



February 24, 2022

**Public Hearing on:**

**House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023**

**(Department of Developmental Services)**

Good afternoon/evening, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Daniel Mathieu, I live in Wolcott and I am an area Director at Key Human Services, Inc. based in Wethersfield. Key is a statewide organization providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Key provides a combination of community based individual and residential supports in 40+ towns and all 8 counties in CT as a provider for DDS, DCF and DSS.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the state budget and its impact on the work that we do. I also want to thank you for your support to provide a living wage to our staff and to invest in the future of nonprofits. Despite your efforts, the crisis continues, so I ask you to continue your commitment to our work with additional funding this year.

It has been another year filled with unexpected challenges across the board ranging from fiscal shortfalls; to pandemic surges; to a catastrophic staff shortages the likes of which we have not previously encountered. The beginning of the fiscal year brought a significant wage increase for our DSPs, however, this was not inclusive to all of our staff. The funding is so specific that some staff received 10% raises while staff that have been committed to the individuals for 20 years received 3%. What message does that send to our staff? Wage compression is damaging when only one group receives a reward that is withheld from other groups. Agencies cannot afford to increase everyone's salary without the funding.

Last year's funding was not in the form of a COLA and did not allow us to address long unfunded issues in the agency. Please consider a COLA for DDS providers with the wage funding this year.

As you know, Staff Shortages are affecting everyone. But due to the intensity of our staff shortages this crisis has reached a devastating level for the people we support. Our agency has a 25% vacancy rate and has had for months on end. What service providers are experiencing threatens the health and safety of the individuals we support as well as our staff. Every day is a struggle to meet staffing needs, every day

people work 16 or more hours for too many days in a row, every day staff get frozen in, managers or people unfamiliar with the program are called in, and we are constantly scrambling to cover shifts.

The people we support get less attention, less activities and less connection with their community because there are not enough staff, the staff we do have are exhausted, because this has become a devastating shortage. Overtime is through the roof, and honestly, has become an afterthought at this point.

Individuals are home during the day, due to day and vocational program closures or quarantines or due to their own exposures or illness. And this time is unfunded, and is an additional draw on an already depleted staffing pool. Over the last year, inflation rose by almost six percent, surpassing the COLA in the current year's budget. Costs have increased exponentially especially for food, supplies, fuel, repairs, etc.

If this didn't provide enough challenges, and stress, surges of Covid swept through our agency with 20-30 staff out per week creating even more intense staff shortages and increasing costs with overtime and incentive pay!

Please take action to support the nonprofits that are underfunded, overwhelmed and hanging on by a thread:

- Increase funding by the additional 8% for FY23
- Please support Governor Lamont's proposals from the American Rescue Plan Act for DDS:
  - \$5 million in FY23 for infrastructure improvements for public and privately-owned camps.
  - \$5 million in FY23 to provide additional recreational and leisure opportunities to facilitate socialization and connections as the state emerges from the pandemic.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Dan Mathieu

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